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ABSTRACT

This document offers practical guidelines and suggestions to assist those responsible for reviewing, evaluating, developing, and implementing general education curricula. Emphasis is placed on collaborative practices, ongoing open communication, thorough planning, and reliable information, with the aim of facilitating the process of renewing a program from inception to a successful conclusion. Organizational, political, academic, and financial issues are considered, together with the role of responsibilities of leadership. The first step to renewing a general education program should be to set up a task force that develops a time line for program review and revision, and a summary of contemporary trends in general education. The task force should then develop a list of learning objectives for the program, involving members of the campus community who are not on the task force. The identified learning objectives should then be evaluated as to whether they are currently being met by the present program. If they are, the work of the task force is finished. If they aren't being met, then a new or revised education program must be developed. Once a new program is designed, a time line for implementation should be constructed and assessment modes keyed to successive implementation stages should be built. The program should then be presented to the faculty for approval. Once approved, the curriculum can be developed, courses can be developed, the program can be implemented, and faculty development activities can be created. The new program should continue to be evaluated, as well as the evaluation process itself. (Contains 10 references.) (EMS)

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Working Paper # 24

Reviewing and Renewing General Education: A Practical Guide

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Abstract

The process of reviewing and renewing a program of general education is complex, challenging, and often frustrating. This paper is presented with the aim of facilitating the process from inception to successful conclusion. Practical guidelines and suggestions, derived from long experience as faculty member, academic administrator, and consultant, are offered to assist those responsible for reviewing, evaluating, developing, and implementing general education curricula. Emphasis is placed on collaborative practices, ongoing open communication, thorough planning, and reliable information. It is assumed throughout, that pitfalls can be avoided, obstacles circumvented, and a climate of civility maintained despite the difficulty and scope of the task.

Introduction

Everyone even remotely connected with higher education knows that the typical undergraduate degree program consists of three parts: the major, electives, and general education. Of the three, only the segment labeled general education is the source of disagreement or uncertainty among educators as to purpose, objectives, and content. It is fair to state that no other area of the curriculum has generated as much debate and conflict for the past fifteen or twenty years as has general education. If the hours spent on this issue by American faculty and academic administrators were to be reckoned up, the number would resemble the national debt. Only rarely does the institution that has embarked, for whatever reason, on the review of its general education requirements for the purposes of program revision and renewal, find the going obstacle free. Too often the result is either a watered-down compromise or the decision to retain the status quo or the implementation of a program that will predictably disappear even before it matures. Frustration abounds, academic community suffers, students, ultimately, are the losers.

This situation is not inevitable. On the contrary, institutions can adopt strategies that are more likely to result in productive, creative curriculum review and renewal. This paper will describe these strategies and the pitfalls they are intended to avoid or at least mitigate. Organizational, political, academic, and financial issues will be considered, together with the role and responsibilities of leadership. Emphasis is on process based on sound information and the willingness to acknowledge, understand, and deal with concerns. It should finally be noted that the author, despite her own biases, is not advocating any particular mode or concept of general education. That is a matter to be determined in the context of institutional mission and purpose by those directly involved, although the suggestions to be offered may assist with the identification of appropriate programmatic directions.

The material to be presented is derived largely from the author's experiences in a variety of contexts: chief academic officer in public and private institutions; consultant on general education to small and large institutions across the country; active involvement, including a past presidency, in the Association for General and Liberal Studies; curriculum planner, including leadership in the development of the "Bradford Plan For A Practical Liberal Arts Education"; and writer on general education and related topics. No less significant, a debt of gratitude and deep appreciation is owed to talented professionals in the field whose publications continue to be a source of wisdom, and most particularly to Dr. Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College, Columbia University, and longtime colleague and friend.

First Steps

The word is out. There will be an in-depth review and evaluation of the general education program on your campus. Moreover, it is expected that the review will lead to the planning, development, and implementation of a revised program, better suited to contemporary educational needs and attractive to prospective students and parents. Why this major step? Perhaps a regional accreditation visit looms on the horizon and the last report cited general education as an area of concern. Perhaps a new president or provost finds the existing program inadequate. The admissions office may have signaled the need for a more inviting curriculum to feature in their literature. Student leaders may have expressed displeasure with present requirements. In some instances the impetus arises from faculty leadership interested in innovation and change; more rarely, from alumni or trustees. Whatever the reason, the announcement that a review task force is to be named will give rise to mixed reactions, ranging from "Here we go again" to "It's about time" to "What's wrong with what we have?" Without question, the skeptics and the opponents to change will quickly begin mustering supporters. Therefore, it is critical to put in place a task force of faculty, administrators, and students that will be regarded positively and that can do the job expeditiously, capably, and sensitively.

Most typically a review task force is named and charged by a senior academic officer who also appoints the task force chair, sometimes him or herself. This can work if the officer in question takes the time to consult with faculty leadership as to prospective membership based on stated criteria such as representation of disciplines or units, demonstrated fair-mindedness, interest, and, very important, tact and patience. An important element of confidence can be established through the selection process that will reap benefits in the weeks to come. So, the provost or dean is urged to listen, reflect, and choose carefully, knowing that, while it will be impossible to achieve an ideal mix, the principle of "majority rules" remains operative.

When the Task Force has been named and an early date set for the first meeting, the chair should get to work. "Be prepared" is an adage that serves academe as well as it does the Boy Scouts of America. Optimally, the chair should go into that first meeting prepared to present three topics: the charge to the Task Force, a time line for program review and revision, and a summary of contemporary trends in general education. It will be useful to expand briefly on these three topics.

Task Force Charge

The Task Force charge should be succinct, direct, and honest. Plain English works better than academic jargon. As work progresses, the chair will frequently need to refer back to the charge, reminding the group of why they are there and of

the parameters of the task. If the document is diffuse or ambiguous, the results are apt to be equally so.

Time Line

The importance of a time line for the work of the group cannot be overemphasized. Too many similar initiatives have failed because the debate is permitted to continue ad nauseum, actions are not taken, decisions avoided. Participants lose interest. Their time, of which there is never enough, can be better spent. Ultimately, either nothing is accomplished or the resulting product is at best disappointing. A calendar should include deadlines for the various stages of the task, including information gathering, dissemination of findings, outreach to the campus community, the planning and development of a new or revised program, trial runs of new offerings, evaluation by internal and/or external sources, and implementation phases. These stages will be discussed in some detail below. It is recommended that, in so far as possible, target dates be set on the basis of the established campus calendar, e.g. dates for submission of new catalog and recruitment material, orientation and registration dates, trustee meetings, etc. There are distinct psychological advantages to be gained by having factors external to the work of the Task Force provide the pressure for adherence to schedule.

Summary of Trends in General Education

The chair should not assume that Task Force members are knowledgeable about trends and developments in general education. While faculty keep abreast of their disciplines through conference attendance, journals, and the Internet, they are less likely to be familiar with the concepts and structures of general education, as they have evolved in recent years. Therefore, the chair will need to provide this information as necessary background for discussion and evaluation. Many institutions find it useful, at this juncture, to invite a consultant in general education to present the needed information and often to run a workshop focused on curricular and organizational issues. This event can be offered exclusively to the Task Force or to the campus community at large. A campus-wide event can be extremely useful in kicking off and recognizing the work of the Task Force and in setting a pattern of broad involvement in the project.

Next Steps

At this point the group is ready to evaluate the existing requirements. But against which criteria will the evaluation be performed? What are the targeted educational outcomes of the program? Unless and until these questions are

answered, evaluation will prove little. What role should general education play in the intellectual and personal development of students? Apart from competency in a major field of study, what do the students at your institution need in the way of knowledge, understandings, and skills, for satisfying, productive lives in the complex world of the twenty-first century? What is, or should be, the relationship between general education and a specialized area of study? In short, what is your vision of the well prepared, broadly educated graduate, ready for a life marked by inevitable change and challenge?

These are not easy questions, but they lie at the heart of the enterprise. The answers will vary from institution to institution, reflecting differences in student populations and institutional missions. No one, surely, will question the value of effective communication skills or the ability to reason critically and analytically or to gather and use information. However, once these objectives have been identified and endorsed, the discussion will doubtless move into areas less apt to generate consensus. For example, is there an identifiable body of knowledge that should be acquired by educated men and women to serve as a base for further learning? Is it more important to understand various ways of knowing or to assimilate information? Is it an institutional responsibility to foster ethical standards and value systems upon which to base judgments and decisions? What about learning to understand and appreciate those who live and think differently from ourselves? Is it important to comprehend the basic concepts of science and the language of mathematics? Is it perhaps equally important to gain an appreciation of the arts, as well as that of service and civic responsibility? This is by no means a comprehensive list of the questions likely to arise in Task Force discussions. It serves only to emphasize the necessity of coming to grips with and identifying the multiple purposes of general and liberal learning at your institution.

The Process

What follows is a process that has worked well on a number of campuses. The process has two purposes: 1) to develop a list of learning objectives for the general education program; 2) to involve members of the campus community who are not on the Task Force. The importance of broad-based involvement, parenthetically, will be stressed throughout these pages. If the first glimpse of Task Force work is a full-blown proposal presented to the faculty senate for approval, it may not receive a welcome reception. So, encourage participation, listen, and be appreciative.

First, ask each member of the Task Force to prepare a list of learning objectives for general education, developed independently and deemed important for your students. The chair will generate and distribute a cumulative list indicating the number of citations for each item, asking each member to study the list for the next meeting and reduce it to approximately ten or fifteen objectives. From this activity a second cumulative list can be developed, representing the thinking of the

majority of the group.

Second, go public. At this juncture you have the opportunity to solicit input from others, to involve them informally in the review process. Bear in mind that you are not seeking approval; rather you are inviting suggestions and reactions. What do faculty colleagues think of the provisional list? Is it overly ambitious? Incomplete? Appropriate to the institutional mission? How do students react? Do they see value in the objectives cited and if not, why not? How do administrators respond? The means of obtaining feedback depend on the size and culture of the institution. Whatever the occasion, however, a team of two Task Force members should be present to promote conversation, listen, and take notes. I have found that the presence of two Task Force representatives promotes give and take and fosters comprehensive reporting back. Open ended invitations to brown bag lunches or coffee hours, a designated cafeteria table at lunch time, evening visits to residence hall lounges, departmental get-togethers in a neutral location, e-mail requests for response, all these methods and many others can work to your advantage. You will have gained supporters through your openness; at the very least you will have conveyed the message that the Task Force has nothing to hide.

Third, based on Task Force discussions and campus responses, develop a definitive list of general education learning objectives. Use jargon-free language, be realistic in terms of available human, fiscal, and learning resources, and focus on areas of knowledge, themes, and ways of knowing that have been determined significant to the education of your students. Circulate the list campus-wide, indicating that it will serve as the basis for the forthcoming review process.

Evaluation of the Existing General Education Program

The primary question before you is: are the identified learning objectives met by the present general education requirements, in terms of structure, curriculum, and pedagogy? To respond, you will need both qualitative and quantitative information.

For example, if your institution offers a broad-based or loosely structured distribution requirement, how many and which courses satisfy the requirement? (One university at which I consulted was surprised to learn that over three hundred courses could be used, some of which required prerequisites; only the registrar had a comprehensive list.) In the case of distribution, is there an enrollment pattern that perhaps reflects and contributes to students' majors? Are there upper level courses required and if not, should there be? Do popular courses meeting the requirement tend to be overly large? Do teaching methodologies advance learning objectives? Do the "Introduction to...." courses that often fulfill general education requirements reflect the desired learning objectives or do they serve primarily as the foundation for specific majors?

The information needed to consider these and related questions should be readily available. The Registrar can provide quantitative data, e.g. number and level of courses, course enrollment figures, patterns of course selection, etc. The collection of qualitative data focuses on issues of curricular integrity, programmatic coherence, effective pedagogies, level of student satisfaction, and so forth. Course syllabi can be examined. Small group interviews with students and faculty will offer insights and, once again, give others the opportunity to be heard. Of interest may be the number of exceptions or exemptions allowed students for reasons of scheduling conflict or personal preference. Assessment data over several years, if available, will indicate whether existing educational objectives are being achieved, for example, in the areas of communication skills, attitudinal growth, scientific understanding, etc.

Collecting and analyzing data is most efficiently carried out by assigning tasks to subgroups of two or three Task Force members. They should report back and the chair, or appointed individual, should prepare a summary of findings as they relate to the established list of general education objectives. Distribution of the summary campus-wide is recommended.

At this point the Task Force is prepared to determine whether and to what extent the existing requirements are achieving the learning objectives previously identified. If the outcome is satisfactory, the work of the Task Force is finished and a final report can be issued. If the outcome is less than satisfactory, a new phase of deliberation is in order.

Developing A New Or Revised General Education Program

This phase of activity is the most complex, most challenging, and most apt to generate controversy. It involves change, and change may be unwelcome. When the requirements for general education are altered, changes can have an impact on departments, faculty, structures, and often on budgets. Departments fear possible loss of enrollments or, conversely, increased program responsibilities. Faculty may not appreciate the need to prepare new courses, to give up the tried and true, or experiment with new teaching techniques. Departmental faculty lines may be redistributed to accommodate curricular change. It is at this point that Task Force leadership becomes most significant, both in setting an agenda and in promoting a climate of good will and collegiality. Not only should the successful chair be skillful in moving matters along at a pace that ensures the continuing interest of participants, but he or she should find ways to reconcile differences, soothe flaring tempers, suggest alternatives if an impasse is reached, and be willing to explore multiple directions. Conversely, should the chair appear committed from the outset to a particular model or scenario, whether from personal preference or reflecting a directive from above, the effort is likely doomed to fail.

It is not the purpose of this paper to describe in detail the various

configurations of general education programs found across the country, nor to advocate a particular program type. At this juncture the Task Force will be well informed concerning program models, their structures and educational goals. Discussion can now focus on three issues: 1) learning objectives that reflect and support institutional mission; 2) programmatic coherence and meaningfulness; 3) the realities of institutional human, physical, and financial resources. Each of these interrelated issues has been mentioned above in connection with the review process. Now they will be the focus of a curriculum planning process. Once again, it will be expedient to appoint Task Force subcommittees to study and report back on their assigned topic.

Subcommittees

The task of Subcommittee One should be to review once again the list of learning objectives identified earlier with the understanding that this list will serve as the basis for curricular design.

- Do the objectives adequately target institutional mission and purposes?
- Is the list perhaps overly ambitious?
- Can the items be prioritized?
- When students complete a general education program designed to accomplish stated objectives, will they have acquired the knowledge, skills, and understandings you believe are essential to educated persons of the twenty-first century and to their ongoing personal and professional growth?
- What would you like to hear from your alumni in ten and twenty years about the effects of their general education experience?

When these and related questions have been answered to the satisfaction of the Task Force, it will be advisable to bring your definitive list of learning objectives to the faculty governance body for formal approval. There are advantages to approval in stages. You will be continuing to foster communication and openness. The opportunity to formally consider the list will be appreciated. The Task Force will be seen as making good progress. And finally, although there are no guarantees, approval at this first stage is likely to produce a psychological advantage when a full-blown program of studies is presented.

Sub-Committee Two has the challenging task of program design. This group should be assured that there is no one "right" program of general education. The central issue is how best to achieve stated objectives for the students at your institution. You may conclude that a core of required courses over one to four years is most appropriate, or you may opt for a distribution requirement offering limited choices. Or you may propose a series of paired or clustered courses thematically or topically based. It may be found that a senior-year capstone course or project is in order, or that a service-learning component should be included in one or more general education courses. The possibilities are virtually limitless because

elements of two or more configurations can be combined. Most important, however, is that the program demonstrates coherence and purposefulness. Indeed, purpose - a set of learning objectives - will drive coherence. Students will be able to look back at the program and see meaningful relationships and connections among their courses. They will see that knowledge and skills do not come in discrete packages to be learned in isolation from one another and likely forgotten. And they will have acquired an intellectual base upon which to build over a lifetime, one that supports and enriches their major field of study while it promotes a broad understanding of past and present.

As the discussion of Subcommittee Two matures, it is critical to maintain lines of communication across campus. Make it clear that you welcome the reactions and suggestions of others. Issue progress reports. Express appreciation for the helpfulness of colleagues. Request information from other institutions with programs similar to those you are considering. Inquire as to the efficacy and durability of their programs and whether there are plans for revision or major change. The insights gained from the experience of others can be invaluable.

When the Subcommittee presents a draft program proposal to the Task Force, disagreement can be expected, particularly if substantive changes are involved. Here the elements of patience, tact, and leadership come strongly into play. The chair must see that sufficient information is provided and that the reasoning behind the proposal is clearly expressed. He or she must see to it that the presentation is received respectfully, while leading the presenters to accept criticism and alternative suggestions without resentment or hostility. Emphasizing that this is a work-in-progress will be helpful, as will occasional brief recesses to allow the dust to settle. Very important, the chair should take it upon him or herself to point out the ways in which the proposal does or does not target the learning objectives already identified.

Subcommittee Three begins its work when the Task Force has at least provisionally approved the draft proposal, along with any revisions put in place. Their task is to determine whether and to what extent institutional resources are available to deliver the program as configured. Does the program demand additional full- or part-time faculty in certain departments? Are faculty members prepared and willing to offer new courses or to experiment with varied teaching strategies or engage in teaching paired or clustered courses? Will a program of faculty development be helpful and if so, how will it be funded? Will existing classroom and laboratory spaces be sufficient for course scheduling? Are library and computer resources adequate to meet curricular demands? These and other questions offer opportunities to consult with academic administrators as information is sought. Building this bridge at a critical point in the work of the Task Force will reap dividends in the final stages of approval and implementation.

When Subcommittee Three has completed its fact-finding and the Task Force is satisfied that the proposed program is feasible, two related steps will

complete the process: one, constructing a time line for program development and implementation, and two, building in assessment modes keyed to successive implementation stages. Contingent on the extent of change envisaged, a scenario of two to four years is usually appropriate for development and implementation. The schedule should be as precise as possible, stipulating the preparation and first offering (optimally on a pilot basis) of each new course, faculty development activities, and year in which the program will be complete and required of all entering first year students. (That date should be marked by a special campus-wide celebration to which parents, alumni, trustees, and local dignitaries are invited.) The importance of maintaining the schedule will be emphasized below.

It is essential that evaluation be linked to program development. After each first course offering, evaluation should occur, preferably by an outside evaluator. The objective eye of a neutral specialist can identify both strengths and weaknesses in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy while the course is still in a developmental stage. Fine-tuning will result, and data obtained from the review can be compared with those collected after subsequent course offerings. The Task Force will also want to include in its proposal a methodology for assessing over time whether and to what degree the general education program is achieving its learning objectives. Also recommended is an in-depth review after the program has matured, optimally in the fifth or sixth year of implementation, providing opportunity for further revision as deemed desirable and ensuring that a required curriculum does not become stale or outdated.

The Approval Process

The Task Force is ready to present its work for approval by the faculty governance body. This is the moment of truth. Bear in mind, however, that there will be few, if any, surprises in your proposal. The lines of communication have been strong and consistent. You have listened well, received advice gracefully, and developed firm relationships with many colleagues. Your proposal demonstrates that you understand both the educational needs of your students and the limitations of available resources. In short, your position is one of strength.

The Task Force chair should present the proposal, occasionally calling upon one or more of the members for amplification or clarification. When questions or comments arise, he or she should be prepared to respond informatively and tactfully. Inevitably there will be those among the listeners who will seize the opportunity to jump in with negative remarks. The chair should not hesitate to call upon a few faculty leaders known to feel positively about the proposal and solicit their opinions. Note that it is in your interest to bring the matter to a vote as quickly as discussion permits. Provide assurance that ongoing evaluation will protect and enhance the quality of the program, both during implementation and in future years. While approval can never be guaranteed, there is every reason to believe that the process as outlined in this paper, together with the openness, collegiality, and

civility demonstrated by the Task Force as it went about its work, will result in success.

Curriculum Development

Once program approval is granted, the task of curriculum development begins. This phase will require oversight. Many institutions have in place a dean or director of general education or a faculty committee charged with oversight. Should this not be the case, it is strongly recommended that such an appointment be made. Responsibilities will include maintaining course preparation and implementation schedules on track, coordinating faculty development and evaluation activities, monitoring the general education budget, and taking part in general education staffing appointments.

Course Development

After consultation, courses earmarked for new development or revisions are assigned to individual faculty. It will be helpful if a few faculty who have served on the Task Force will also be responsible for offering certain of the new courses, as they have a solid understanding of issues and objectives. Dates for first course offerings will be established to provide adequate time for preparation, e.g. a semester or a summer. First offerings can be staggered over a period of two to three years in order to avoid overburdening of faculty or negative impact on existing curricula.

Faculty responsible for course development should receive either a stipend or release time as compensation. If funds are in short supply, the institution is advised to find sufficient dollars through a one-time reduction of typically under-enrolled courses or sections.

As noted earlier, it is recommended that new courses be offered first on a pilot basis and then subjected to evaluation, preferably by an objective consultant or, if that is not feasible, by a faculty committee.

- Does the course have clear objectives and do those objectives achieve the purposes of general education as defined by your institution?
- Is the curriculum designed to achieve stated objectives?
- Do teaching strategies foster purposes?
- What are student reactions to the course?
- Do they understand why the course is important to their education?
- Do elements of the curriculum interrelate purposefully with other segments of the general education program?

Answers to these and related questions will point to any need for revision as the course matures.

Program Implementation

At the end of the agreed-upon period, e.g. two to four years, all new or revised courses should have been offered at least once and subsequently evaluated. The general education requirements now become mandatory for all entering students. A celebratory event is in order. Consider, for example, a convocation featuring a nationally recognized speaker on general and liberal studies or a day of seminars and presentations to which parents, alumni, and trustees are invited. Your hard work merits recognition and those who played a major role in the effort will appreciate public acknowledgement.

An issue that will inevitably surface following two or more years of implementation is the need to rotate general education courses among faculty. The majority of faculty will not wish to continue offering the same course year after years, perhaps limiting opportunity to teach in their area of specialization. Staleness may set in. Therefore, those supervising the program should insure that several faculty are prepared to teach a given course in rotation, with the understanding that, while content is likely to change, course objectives remain true to the original program design.

During the implementation period, it will be important to maintain faculty enthusiasm and confidence in the new program. Opportunities to share their achievement with colleagues beyond the campus walls should be encouraged and supported. Conference presentations and journal articles can promote both program and institution effectively. Local cable television interviews inform the community from which may be drawn numbers of students. Alumni publications and events are important generators of good will. Taking advantage of all means of communicating with the broader public will foster pride among campus constituencies and thereby contribute to program vitality and stability.

Faculty Development

Successful program implementation demands a range of faculty development activities. Those teaching or planning to teach in the new program will benefit enormously from campus-based seminars, discussion groups, and presentations dealing with the substance and pedagogy of general education. Faculty evaluations of these events never fail to emphasize the benefits and enjoyment from activities that bring together representatives of diverse disciplines to learn, share experiences, and form new working relationships. It is within these groups of fifteen to thirty faculty that interdisciplinarity takes root, team teaching may

be initiated, and new teaching strategies recommended.

Intensive summer workshops of one to three weeks are particularly recommended. The season lends itself to a relaxed, informal atmosphere with fewer demands on time. In order to achieve the desired mix of disciplines, gender, and rank, faculty should be required to apply for participation. They should expect to receive a stipend, together with books and other needed materials and, of course, food and drink. A visiting workshop leader can bring new perspectives and energy to the proceedings; however, it is recommended that he or she be invited for only half or two-thirds of the workshop period. The remaining time can then be devoted to preparation, by individual or teams of faculty, of materials to be used in their general education courses. Participants will then come away with a product that will enhance their courses and benefit their students.

Most important to bear in mind is the fact that, whatever form it takes, an ongoing program of faculty development is vital to the long-term success of a general education curriculum. These occasions, whether a brown bag lunch, a half-day seminar, or an extended workshop, are community builders. They stimulate, inform, and renew interest in a central component of the undergraduate curriculum.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation (often termed assessment) is apt to be one of the most difficult and controversial aspects of implementation: difficult because of the complex decisions to be made concerning data needed and instruments to supply the data; controversial because of the sensitivity of the task, which may reveal curricular or instructional weaknesses. A great deal has been written on the subject. Major conferences on assessment, offered by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and other organizations, continue to be offered. Accrediting groups now insist that institutions present a formal program that examines and evaluates the degree to which educational objectives are being met.

Without attempting to recapitulate the literature on assessment, I offer only a few broad guidelines upon which to base the planning and development of an evaluation program. First, program goals and methodology should reflect institutional culture and practices. For example, a small, highly personalized college may be unhappy administering standardized tests that compare results with national norms. Conversely, portfolio assessment may well be an unrealistic process for the land grant university. Second, take particular care that your methodology will produce information that reveals whether and to what extent the general education curriculum is achieving its stated objectives. If critical thinking or attitudinal change figure among your objectives, how can you most effectively measure progress? How will you determine if your students' ability to write and speak cogently and clearly has improved to the degree envisaged? If your general education program

includes a focus on interdisciplinarity, how can you measure understanding of relationships and connections? Third, in developing an assessment program, be sure to seek input and feedback from a broad spectrum of the campus community, just as you did while creating the new or revised general education requirements. And fourth, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Other institutions, many similar to yours, have put in place successful evaluation procedures. Learn about them at conferences and in the literature. If you are interested in a package of standardized tests, which ones have produced the most reliable information? What have proven to be the pluses and minuses of portfolio evaluation, according to colleges similar to yours? Are classroom tests and transcript records reliable indicators of student achievement? Can you adopt or adapt alumni surveys used successfully elsewhere? Finally, it is a given that, just as curriculum and pedagogy should be evaluated periodically, so should the evaluation process itself. Confidence in the methodology and instruments can only be maintained through periodic scrutiny.

Afterthoughts

As a consultant, one of my oft-repeated messages is this: curriculum is never static, nor should it be. The world changes; so do students. Educational needs evolve, reflecting new circumstances. In our technologically based information age, change is ever more rapid. Therefore, expect that, five years hence, elements of your general education program will be found to need adjustment, if only of a minor nature. This should not be interpreted as failure. Just as a course in one's area of specialization requires periodic updating, so does a general education curriculum. In short, your aim will be to maintain and foster a program marked by vitality, timeliness, and efficacy.

If you are reading this paper preliminary to embarking on a review of general education at your institution, please accept my most sincere good wishes for a successful and rewarding experience. To you and your colleagues, may the wind be always at your back.

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About the Author

Janice S. Green's thirty-five year career in higher education includes service as university faculty member, senior governmental administrator, chief academic officer, writer, evaluator, and consultant. She has served also as interim president at two institutions.

In 1991 Dr. Green returned from Bradford College after ten years as chief academic officer where she played a key role in the revitalization of a troubled liberal arts institution. Under her leadership the College successfully developed and implemented a general education core program, the Bradford Plan for a Practical Liberal Arts Education. That program received national recognition. Since "retiring" Dr. Green spent a year as interim CEO of the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley, and now serves as a senior associate with the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE). Over the years she has consulted at many institutions, including most recently Pine Manor College, the Urban College of Boston, St. Joseph's College (IN), the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Dean College, and the University System of Georgia.

Areas of special interest include institutional planning and evaluation, curriculum planning and development, and faculty affairs. Among her professional activities she lists two terms on the Commission of Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the presidency of the Association for General and Liberal Studies.

About the New England Resource Center for Higher Education

The New England Reseource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), founded in 1988, is dedicated to improving colleges and universities as workplaces, communities, and organizations. NERCHE addresses this issue through think tanks, research, consulting, professional development, and publications.